

April
2008

ANIMATION

MAGAZINE

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 **Special
Asian
Animation
Focus**

**Springtime for Seuss:
Blue Sky Flies High with
Horton Hears A Who!**

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FICCI Frames/ Hong Kong Filmart Cover: Kahani World's *Raju the Rickshaw*

Asian market editions include a special Asian Animation Directory and Toon Titans editorial focus.



As we were preparing this special issue devoted to Asian animation, we came across a quote by Ivy Ho, Hong Kong-Asia Film Financing Forum's director, which nicely sums up what's happening in Asia today. "Nowadays there are no purely Hong Kong productions. Nearly every film these days is made with Chinese or Asian partners—or with Europeans or even Americans," said Ho to *Variety*'s Patrick Frater last month. "That's a model that the Europeans have had for years. Nowadays, Asian audiences are looking for good productions and new talent. They don't hesitate to reject something local if it is not good enough and are increasingly watching non-local productions."

Although Ho is referring to all kinds of productions, the statement also encompasses animated fare. The growth of this sector of the industry in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, India and Malaysia in recent years has resulted in more companies seeking co-production partners and more projects seeking financing from governments in the continent. That's why we thought it would be a timely resource to provide an overall directory to animation companies in the region with this issue, as well as offering our first 40 Toon Titans of Asia selection for your perusal. If you or your boss didn't make the list, please don't send us angry emails. Consider this issue just a start. We promise to review everyone's accomplishments and offer a sequel in the near future!

Ellen Wolff's cover story on *Horton Hears a Who!* may not have a direct Asian connection, but since Jimmy Hayward and Steve Martino's movie hits theaters this month, we just knew that a lot of our readers were hungry to learn everything about this much-anticipated CG adaptation of the Dr. Seuss classic. Ellen was lucky to get full access to the directors for her story, and I'm sure you'll enjoy her insightful piece on this Fox/Blue Sky release.

Of course, no Asian issue would be complete without some mention of everyone's favorite master, Hayao Miyazaki. I recently read somewhere that although he's a workaholic, Miyazaki insists on taking a nap every day between 1 and 1:30 p.m. I don't know why, but I find this quite fascinating. Maybe the world would be a much better (and productive) place if everyone followed the example of the great director, whose new feature *Gake no ue no Ponyo* (*Ponyo on a Cliff*) will be released in Japan this summer. The director's 17th feature is about the friendship between a five-year-old boy and a goldfish princess who dreams of becoming human. We promise to give you the full scoop on this exciting production in upcoming issues. Now back to our nap!




Ramin Zahed
Editor-in-Chief
rzahed@animationmagazine.net

“Quote of the Month”

“How are salad plates like TV animation writers? They're both the first things that are taken off the table!”

—Tom Kenny, (voice of SpongeBob SquarePants) at the 35th Annual Annie Awards, in reference to the Writers' Guild negotiations with the studios.



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Info@animationmagazine.net

President Jean Thoren
Publisher Jodi Bluth
Accounting Jan Bayouth
Webmaster Eric Brandenberg

EDITORIAL [Edit@animationmagazine.net](mailto>Edit@animationmagazine.net)

Editor-in-Chief Ramin Zahed

Web and Gaming Editor Ryan Ball

Contributing Editors Chris Grove, Ron Magid, Barbara Robertson

Editorial Assistant Mercedes Milligan

Animation Art Advisor Ron Barbagallo

Digital Reviews Editor Todd Sheridan Perry

Contributors Thomas J. McLean, Charles Solomon, Ellen Wolff, Patrick Drazen, Tad Osaki

ADVERTISING SALES

Sales@animationmagazine.net

Sheri Shelton

PRODUCTION Prod@animationmagazine.net

Art and Production Director Susanne Rector

CIRCULATION Circ@animationmagazine.net

Circulation Director Jan Bayouth

Circulation Administrator Alexis Beebe

TO ADVERTISE:

Phone: 818-991-2884

Fax: 818-991-3773

Email: Sales@animationmagazine.net

Website: www.animationmagazine.net

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The Animation Planner

April



1 You're no April Fool today if you spend your money wisely—on the new *Appleseed: Ex Machina* HD/Standard DVD combo pack. Also out today:

DinoSquad Volume 1 and 2.



3-5 Catch some rays as well as cool toons at the **South Beach Animation Festival** in Florida (www.southbeachanimationfestival.com).



4-8 Taipei is the hot spot today as the **Taiwan Int'l Children's TV and Film Festival** kicks off with a slate of new tyke faves and networking opportunities (www.tictff.org.tw).



15 Don't forget to pick up three new DVDs out in stores today: *SpongeBob SquarePants: Pest of the West*, *Woody Woodpecker and Friends Classic Cartoon Collection Vol. 2* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Season 6*.



22 If you know a kid who loves animation, you can tell them about *Wonder Pets: Save the Beetles* and *Oban Star-Racers Vol. 1* out on DVD today.



22 If you know a kid who loves animation, you can tell them about *Wonder Pets: Save the Beetles* and *Oban Star-Racers Vol. 1* out on DVD today.

7-11 TV production and



distrib pros will find their way to the French Riviera once again for the spring market known as **MIPTV** (www.mipty.com).

3-16 The city of brotherly love becomes toon-obsessed this month as the Philadelphia Film Society and the Univ. of the Arts present **The Philadelphia Animation Festival** (www.phillyfests.com).



8 Out on DVD today: *Ben 10: Race Against Time*, **Cartoon Network's live-action movie based on its hit animated show!**



Network's live-action movie based on its hit animated show!



4 Jodie Foster, Gerard Butler and *Little Miss Sunshine's* Abigail Breslin are all well cast in the female-skewing Indiana Jones-type adventure pic, *Nim's Island*. Auds in search of a good scare may opt for Carter Smith's adaptation of the best-selling yarn, *The Ruins*.

11-17 It's time to head over to Vegas for the **National Assoc. of Broadcasters** trade show, which will showcase new tech tools and gadgets (www.nabshow.com).



18 A young boy travels back in time to ancient China in the magical kung fu adventure *The Forbidden Kingdom*, which co-stars Jackie Chan and Jet Li.

10-13 It's not Positano—but Salerno, Italy will do just fine, grazie! It's time for another edition of the picturesque **Cartoons on the Bay** festival (www.cartoonsbay.com).



18-20 Big Apple toon and fantasy fans get a sneak peek of cool upcoming projects at the **New York Comic-Con** (www.nycomic-con.com).



21-25 Danbury, CT hosts the seventh annual **AniFest** computer animation festival (<http://cs.wcsu.edu/cgr/festival08>).



24-May 8 This year's **San Francisco Int'l Film Festival** has a healthy animation sidebar (www.siff.org/festival).



25 Ok, so *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* may not have any obvious cartoon connections, but we're sure you'll want to check it out in theaters this weekend!



29 Goths and otakus can escape the springtime sunshine by staying in and watching *Death Note: Volume 4* which comes out today.



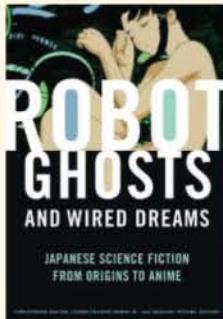
30-May 4 Once again, you're invited to wear your best alien costume and head over to the U.K. for the **Sci-Fi-London** festival (www.sci-fi-london.com).





Manga and anime fans already know that some of most imaginative and haunting science fiction of the modern era has been created by Japanese artists and authors, especially in the period right after the Second World War. **Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams**, the recently published collection from the Univ. of Minnesota Press, offers a timely look at the contribution of Japanese masters of the written word. It's easy to trace the influences of these authors on hugely influential animated TV series and features such as *Astro Boy*, *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*. Using an eclectic team of contributors—from academic scholars to leading Japanese critics—the book gives readers a healthy blueprint of the origins of these “robot dreams,” and charts their influence on global pop cultural phenomena such as *The Matrix*. Forget the blue pill vs. red pill dilemma! If you want to learn about real groundbreaking sci-fi visionaries, this is the book to take to heart.

Scholarly, critical and fan-based writings also make up the fabric of the second volume of **Mechademia**, a thoughtful collection edited by Frenchy Lunning, a professor of liberal arts at the Minneapolis College of Art of Design. Subtitled **Networks of Desire**, this new volume looks at the wide manifestations of sexual and social desire as well as far-reaching topics such as political nostalgia, animalistic



consumptions and—what you've all been waiting for!—techno-carnal fantasies! If you want to read more about the revolutionary ideas behind the idealized same-sex romance of *The Rose of Versailles*, curious about *Ranma 1/2*'s weird and wonderful fan fiction writers or want to explore the visual and political dynamics of *Blood: The Last Vampire*—you'll find this volume absolutely indispensable. You also won't want to miss our writer

Patrick Drazen's excellent essay titled “Sex and the Single Pig: Desire and Flight in *Porco Rosso*.” Aaaah ... don't you love the way Japanese animation can really get people thinking, talking and dreaming? ■

Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime

Edited by Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. and Takayuki Tatsumi

(Univ. of Minnesota Press; hardcover: \$60, paperback: \$20)

Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire

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Cinch a Seussical Sensation

How co-directors Steve Martino and Jimmy Hayward and the top-notch team at Blue Sky Studios came up with a great-looking CG adaptation of Theodor Geisel's *Horton Hears A Who!* **by Ellen Wolff**

Director Steve Martino remembers vividly the first time that he and fellow director Jimmy Hayward made the trip from New York's

Blue Sky Studios to the California home of Audrey and Theodor Geisel, the late Dr. Seuss. "It was an epiphany," says Martino. "On the walls were his sculptural works. We looked at how he had translated what he drew in 2D into a dimensional realm."

The experience convinced the veteran CG artists that there was a clear path to follow in transforming Seuss' beloved book *Horton Hears A Who!* into CG animation. The Fox Animation film—which stars the voices of Jim Carrey as the giant elephant Horton and Steve Carell as the microscopic Mayor of Whoville he befriends—represents the first completely CG-animated Seuss adaptation.

Hayward and Martino were also the

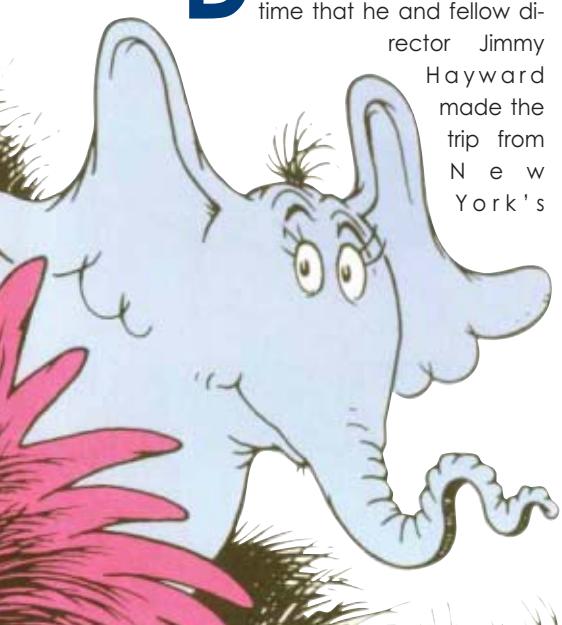
first directors admitted to the Seuss archives at the University of California, San Diego. "We held his original artwork," recalls Hayward. "We studied his doodles and paintings and over 20 manuscripts for *Horton Hears a Who!*" Looking at Seuss' brushwork, notes Martino, "We thought about how we would need to capture each little wrinkle when we modeled this world three-



Jimmy Hayward



Steve Martino



Horton as seen in the original illustration from the 1954 book by Theodor Geisel



Just What the Dr. Ordered: According to the animators at Blue Sky, one of the main challenges of the movie was creating the connection between the two main characters, who never see each other because of their size.

dimensionally. We'd need to create a design bible for the shape language of the film."

They also uncovered additional clues in Geisel's extensive memos to Chuck Jones, who had directed the 1970 *Horton* cartoon for CBS. The directors came away convinced that they needed to give their film an illustrative quality to make it feel like Dr. Seuss. "We had an opportunity to stretch the animation and push facial expressions into crazy places," says Hayward. "If you look at the book, *Horton* isn't really on model. He changes.

"We had an opportunity to stretch the animation and push facial expressions into crazy places. If you look at the book, *Horton* isn't really on model. He changes. So we had to change the way we did rigging. And the fur had to be groomed on characters with furry arms that stretch 30 feet long!"

—Horton co-director Jimmy Hayward

So we had to change the way we did rigging. And the fur had to be groomed on characters with furry arms that stretch 30

feet long." Hayward, whose animation credits include Pixar's *Finding Nemo*, *Monsters, Inc.* and the *Toy Story* films, likens this challenge to what 2D animators face. "They don't get being on model for free. They have to sculpt every frame. My motto with our animators was 'Go too far and then pull back.' It's got to be entertainingly correct."

There was frequently no substitute for hands-on work, especially in the case of the film's feathered villain Vlad, a crazed Russian eagle voiced by Will Arnett. Vlad had sticky feathers that kept falling out—

a design standpoint it's the only place that breaks away from Seuss' pleasant plant forms to a place with more angularity. It's still within the Seuss palette. You never get straight lines with Dr. Seuss!" he notes.

The look of the worlds in *Horton Hears A Who!* was a special focus for Martino, who previously earned an Annie nomination for his art direction in director Chris Wedge's Fox/Blue Sky film *Robots*. "In a Dr. Seuss world you have shapes that are playful and otherworldly, like wild staircases that flow upward. What's wonderful about doing this in computer animation is that we could apply material treatments like stucco in such a way that makes this place feel real."

Blue Sky's ability to populate these worlds in rich detail was particularly impressive for Hayward, who had worked at the studio once before when he directed scenes for *Robots*. "We wanted *Horton* to be a big epic. In one scene there's a field of clovers, and I thought we'd get 100,000 plants. But they gave us a half-billion—

**Kangaroo Conflict:**

"We've had quite enough of your bellowing bungle!
And I'm here to state," snapped the big kangaroo,
"That your silly nonsensical game is all through!"
And the young kangaroo in her pouch said, "Me, too!"

and each clover has 100,000 hairs on it!"

But the central challenge in the film was visualizing how a giant pachyderm like Horton communicates with the Mayor of Whoville, who resides inside a spec of dust on one sprig of clover. Martino explains, "We needed to make the audience understand the connection between two characters who never see each other. The first time we go into the spec of Whoville, we literally travel with Horton's voice saying 'Hellooo...' We take a ride through layers of detail, finally breaking through clouds and having the world of Whoville revealed to us."

Like a comic take on the famous Eames film, *Powers of Ten*, this "ride" carries us along with the sound echoing in Horton's throat and past his teeth, notes Hayward. "We're inside the rings of sound. Then we go back from the Mayor's mouth all the way up to Horton's ears at high speed. We take this 'long way' once, and then we 'short-hand' the process so that

pretty soon we just cut back and forth. It's staged like a telephone conversation, but the line of action was really firm between them. We always maintained which side they were on."

This approach made the sound mix absolutely crucial, and Martino and Hayward worked at Skywalker Sound in Cali-



fornia with Randy Thom, who's won Oscars for his work on *The Incredibles* and *The Right Stuff*. Hayward recalls, "When we pitched the movie to Randy, I said: 'This movie is awesome for you—the two main characters can only hear each other.' The conceit of that idea was so cool. It's a real stretch to believe that the Mayor is the only guy in Whoville who can hear Horton. But you don't want the whole town to hear him because it wouldn't give you the opportunity for the townspeople to think their Mayor is nuts."

The give-and-take between the voices of Jim Carrey and Steve Carell is a key driver of the humor in *Horton Hears A*

Who!, even though the actors never recorded lines together. Fox executive producer Chris Meledandri was instrumental in attracting the film's A-list comic talent, which also includes Seth Rogen and Carol Burnett. "One of our requirements was finding great improvisational actors who could find the cadence for their characters," says Martino. He observes that a lot of the little asides in Carrey's performance of Horton came from the actor "jamming" in the moment. "We would spend some of our recording sessions with Jim just talking about what we'd envisioned for the animation. Then we'd riff on it right there. It was almost like a table reading where he would act the thing out and we'd throw ideas back

and forth. Out of that emerged the character that we have on film."

Remarkably, *Horton* represents Carrey's first foray into voicing an animated character. "Jim provided a lot of great eye acting and facial expressions," notes Hayward, who says they ran lipstick cams of the actors' faces during the readings to show to Blue Sky's animators. "But we didn't go nuts. From an improvisational standpoint, we'd work it out and then script it and record it line by line. *Horton* isn't *Ace Ventura* in an elephant suit!" ■

Fox/Blue Sky's *Horton Hears A Who!* begins its U.S. theatrical run on March 14.

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An Adventure Tale Served with a Twist

Shinji Takagi's 40-minute *SOS! Tokyo Metro Explorers: The Next* puts a new spin on the familiar boys' adventure story. **by Charles Solomon**

Based on a manga by Katsuhiro Ôtomo, the creator of *Akira*, the 40-minute film *SOS! Tokyo Metro Explorers: The Next* (2007) plays like an animated short story.

During a school holiday, four boys search for a forgotten treasure under present-day Tokyo. Ryuhei, the leader of the group, is not happy about his little brother Satoshi ("Sasuke") tagging along. Shun records the entire mission on his father's HDV camera; chubby Yoshio is the cautious member of the team. Yoshio's argumentative younger cousin, Momoyo, joins the adventure uninvited.

As they wander through tunnels and abandoned work sites, the children stumble onto a colony of misfits who have found shelter below the modern metropolis. Their kindly leader Matakichi guides the explorers through the subterranean maze, where they encounter Sojiro Yamashita, an addled army corporal who's still guarding a secret weapon 60-odd years after the end of World War II.

The boys' adventure takes some fantastic turns, but the film has the satisfying feel of a personal reminiscence. In an interview conducted via e-mail, director Shinji Takagi said, "Unfortunately, the area where I played as a child was limited to just one town, so I wasn't able to go to such adventurous places. What probably attracted me to this story was that I wanted to have such an adventure during my childhood."

Tokyo Metro Explorers was done entirely in CG, using toon shaders to simulate the look of

hand-drawn 2D animation. Takagi, who served as director of animation on Ôtomo's *Steamboy* (2004), used simplified designs that work within the limits of the technique. "I'm used to the style of Japanese cel animation, as is the audience. I thought it would help them enter the world of the movie more easily," Takagi explained. "I wanted to use CG for the delicate movements of the characters. With hand-drawn animation there are budgetary limits to the number of drawings that can be done, so the characters can't move freely. In CG, the director can add ideas to increase the effectiveness of the performances while checking the animation."

There have been a few Japanese CG films, but the smaller budgets and the cost of

equipment in a sluggish economy have limited the use of the medium. Producer Hideo Matsushita of Emotion Co., Ltd., adds, "The infrastructure hasn't been completed yet and the costs haven't balanced out. However, talented animators are becoming harder to find, and I think the day will come when we can't create quality movies that meet the expectations of the audience and the director without using 3D CG technology. By then, we will have trained more artists, established an infrastructure and improved our technology. I believe at that time, the costs will balance out."

In America, where animation is expected to meet rigid time limits, a 40-minute film feels like an anomaly. As Matsushita notes, "*Tokyo Metro Explorers* screened for the first time at the Tokyo International Film Festival, and we received a lot of requests from people to visit our studio to learn how we'd made the film. The original author, Katsuhiro Ôtomo, liked the movie and encouraged us to get it into theaters where people could see it. We were able to expand to a nationwide release."

Tokyo Metro Explorers had originally been planned as a direct-to-video release. The filmmakers were surprised to discover that theater owners were interested in shorter works. Matsushita said, "We found there is a rather high demand for shorter films; they need them to fill the time between feature-length films. Theatrical distribution allows you to enjoy a movie in a better environment than at home. That kind of distribution for shorter films may spread in the future."

Takagi was pleased by the film's reception and Ôtomo's reaction: "It made me feel lucky to be the original author." But he has yet to choose his next project, or its medium. "I haven't ruled out working in drawn animation but there are still many possibilities in CG, which I have come to understand," he said. "I think my next movie will most likely be done in CG."

Like many viewers, Takagi became fond of Ryuhei, Satoshi, Yoshio and Shun, and would like to create additional stories for them: "I am very interested in them; while I was at work on this film, I had several ideas for further adventures. If there's a chance, I would like to continue their adventures." ■



SOS! Tokyo Metro Explorers: The Next is distributed in America by Bandai Visual on DVD (\$54.99) and Blu-ray (\$64.99).

Making It in Malaysia

Toon veteran Terry Thoren and his Rocket Fish Studios explore new horizons in Kuala Lumpur and beyond.

Animation entrepreneur Terry Thoren is certainly no stranger to exploring new territories and avenues of growth. After successfully launching an indie toon distribution company in the '80s (Expanded Entertainment), a popular animation festival/confab (L.A.'s World Animation Celebration) and an 11-year stint as CEO of Klasky Csupo where he oversaw the production of TV series and features such as *Rugrats*, *The Wild Thornberrys* and *As Told By Ginger*, Thoren has been using his knowledge and expertise to develop and produce new animated content in Malaysia.

Launched in January 2007, his Rocket Fish Studios recently created the animation for the buzz-generating *Panda* spot for SalesGenie.com, which ran during the much-coveted Super Bowl telecast a month ago. His Kuala Lumpur-based studio also trains local animation talent and has produced animation for several new TV and DVD projects, including Cartoon Saloon's *Skunk Fu!* and DIC's Warren Buffet release *The Secret Millionaire's Club*.

According to Thoren, there are numerous reasons why K.L. is the ideal spot for his new venture. "The Malaysian government wants to promote the animation and tech business in the region," he says. "They funded our training program—we recently had our first graduating class. Then you have to add that Kuala Lumpur is a beautiful city, and it has a talent base that speaks English and has a wonderful, friendly culture. We've discovered that the artists' work ethic is intense, and they really want to make it in this business. Then there's the proximity to the Philippines, India, Singapore, Thailand and Taiwan; it's easy to see why the location proved to be so attractive for us."

Thoren says he tries to hire as many of his company's graduating students as he can. "We offer them an intensive course in Flash animation and bring them into our system and let them work in entry-level jobs." With 75 staffers working in K.L., Rocket Fish is also

setting up a satellite studio in the Philippines. "The minute we push the button, it's a turn-key operation. We have the resources, but we have to make sure we have the right projects."

Seeing Rocket Fish's goals come to fruition in such a short time has made Thoren optimistic about the future. "It's funny, I built



Hot Slate: Cartoon Saloon's *Skunk Fu!* and SalesGenie.com's *Panda* commercial are a two of Rocket Fish's recent projects.



ka-chew!—the advertising division of Klasky Csupo—and we always dreamt of having a Super Bowl commercial, and that never happened!" he says. "That's why it's really rewarding to come out of the gate with the *Panda* commercial that we did for Creative Mint which got this great exposure during the game. We are basically sending the message that 'Yes, we can make creative-driven animation at a great price.'"

One of the reasons new animation houses like Rocket Fish are able to deliver the goods to their clients at lower rates is the good economics of Flash-based animation. "It's a very competitive field out there, so you need to have an edge," Thoren points out. "I oversaw the production of over 600 epi-



Terry Thoren

sodes of traditionally animated shows like *Rugrats*. After researching Flash technologies extensively and seeing how the prices from broadcasters had fallen, I knew that if we were to be competitive and build content for new platforms and mobile media, we had to have a production protocol in Flash."

Thoren says classic Hanna-Barbera toons remind him of Flash-based productions, because they reuse their backgrounds over and over again. "With Flash, you build the database for your assets upfront, so that by the sixth or seventh episode, you begin to save money," he adds.

In addition to Flash, Thoren says Rocket Fish will have Toon Boom and Mojo seats and also offer a combination of Flash with Maya CG backgrounds. In the next few months, the studio will also be working on a new 26-episode co-production with the government of Terengganu titled *Backyard Buddies*. Terengganu artists will be supervised by professional animators from the U.S., Canada and the Philippines to work on this new venture.

It may seem like a lot of work, but Thoren says everyone who's been to Terengganu wants to go back to the tropical paradise. "We're located here on the South China Sea, right by the beach. All the American instructors are dying to come back!" He also has a lot of praise for Kuala Lumpur: "It's not overcrowded or polluted like some of the other Asian territories, there's no language barrier, and everyone is friendly." You know Thoren is on to something when suddenly you feel like dropping everything and booking a one-way ticket to the Malaysian hot spot. ■

Thoren founded Animation Magazine in 1987. His former partner Jean Thoren is now the president and sole owner of this publication.



For more info, visit
www.rocketfishstudios.com.



Ahead of His Time

Innovative Japanese helmer Mamoru Hosoda discusses his award-winning animated feature *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*. **by Patrick Drazen**

Time waits for no one," says a bit of wisdom on a high school blackboard in the animated Japanese film *Toki wo Kakeru Shōjo* (*The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*). Yet, the time is completely right for the film's director, Mamoru Hosoda. A veteran of Toei Animation, Hosoda worked on popular titles from *Sailor Moon* to *One Piece* to *Digimon*. When 20th Century Fox took the first three *Digimon* movies (Hosoda directed the first one), chopped them up and stitched together a new film for theatrical release, Hosoda tells us that he "was horrified." Regardless, his latest offering, a sci-fi romance, has been earning awards and delighting audiences around the world since its 2006 premiere.

Expectations for *TokiKake* (the film's Japanese nickname) were originally rather low. Although based on a beloved novel by Yasutaka Tsutsui (who's already in anime news with the film version of another novel of his, *Paprika*, directed by Satoshi Kon), the book was published in 1967 and has already been filmed three times and turned into a comic book. Word of mouth spread quickly, however, and Hosoda's feature—brilliantly animated by Madhouse—went from art house status to sleeper hit, winning the Japan Academy Prize's first award for animated feature.

"Originally, this movie was supposed to be closely based on the novel," Hosoda says through a translator during an interview at the 2007 Chicago International Film Festival. "However, in exchanging ideas with screenwriter Satoko Okudera, it transformed in another direction. Of course we tried to capture

the spirit of what the novel wanted to convey: the atmosphere, also friendship and the feelings you have toward someone you can relate to. We brought the new story to author Tsutsui, and his first response was, 'Wow; this is a totally different work. But that's why I like it!'

"At the first press announcement of the movie, in March 2006, author Tsutsui said, 'This work is a genuine second-generation of my original work.' This compliment surprised everyone because he hadn't seen the completed animation; he got this impression just by reading the script."

One connection between the anime and the original version is the character known as Auntie Witch (*Majo Obasan*); readers of Tsutsui's novel realize that this character, Kazuko Yoshiyama, is the grown-up version of the original book's Time-Leaper. Now she's an art historian, and spends part of the movie restoring an ancient painting that is pivotal to the plot. "The work of restoration itself is a time-leaping activity, because after you restore it, the old work suddenly becomes fully alive in the present day," Hosoda remarks.

The painting in the movie isn't based on a real painting, but was commissioned for the film. The director notes, "I asked a colleague at Madhouse and explained what type of painting would be required, and that Kazuko Yoshiyama senses that someday the boy she met long ago would come back and see it. She keeps working on restoring the painting for a boy she will probably never meet because the boy lives so far in the future, centuries ahead of us. But she somehow senses that he will come back and see the

painting. The painting is very meaningful in bridging her generation and the future."

TokiKake's international success was a surprise. "We never thought about it," admits Hosoda. "We focused only on Japan because the novel is such a popular novel, but basically in Japan only. It's a classic novel read generation after generation, but only in Japan. So when we decided to make an animated feature based on the novel, we didn't think about marketing the film at all overseas. Honestly, this is the truth!"

He adds, "However, I worked with Kadokawa Publishing Company, which has its own film production house, and they know how to distribute films overseas. To my surprise, I never imagined audiences would respond like Japanese audiences. My impression was that teenage girls and boys overseas would probably react in a different manner. However, they responded exactly the way Japanese teenagers responded. This surprised me."

Hosoda attributes the film's success to the magic of the medium. "The power of animation can reach out and not just be targeted to a younger generation. Animation is wonderful; if we create it with wonderful content, we can approach and we can entertain and we can share what we have with an older generation. What we can share is reminding you that you also leap through time; trace back your own history and you remember those old faces, heartwarming memories. That's probably why the movie is so appealing to so many different generations and different cultural backgrounds. How we all treasure memories is something that never changes—it's eternal."

The director says he has too many favorite animated movies and TV shows, but he singles out *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Night on the Galactic Railroad* and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. When asked about his next project, he is typically enigmatic. "It's based on Japanese literature," is all he tells us. In time, we'll find out more details! ■

Patrick Drazen is a Chicago-based writer who specializes in anime. His credits include *Anime Explosion! The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation* (Stone Bridge Press).



Mamoru Hosoda

For more info about *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, visit www.kadokawa.co.jp/tokikake. Bandai Entertainment and Kadokawa Pictures USA will release the feature in theaters and on DVD in the U.S. this year.

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The Mini-Boom Continues in Singapore

Thanks to the initiatives spearheaded by the country's Media Development Authority, the region's animation and tech industry is showing healthy signs of growth.

by Thomas J. McLean

By most any measurement, Singapore is a small country. A tiny city-state, perched on an island off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, it is home to fewer than 5 million people. But that hasn't stopped Singapore from becoming one of Asia's most technologically advanced economies, with aggressive business development policies that it has used to encourage the birth and growth of a vital animation industry.

Perhaps the most visible sign of Singapore's animation boom is the arrival of Lucasfilm, which put its animation studio in the city and was the primary facility on the upcoming *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* 3D animated series—set to premiere on Cartoon Network this fall after a theatrical release in August.

But much of the credit for the growth of animation in Singapore has to go to the Media Development Authority, which has invested heavily in developing the industry. That, combined with a well-educated and tech-savvy population, Singapore's proximity to the vast markets of China and India, its facility with East-



ern and Western sensibilities and some of the most stringent intellectual property laws in the world have primed the city-state for an animation boom.

A survey of animation studios in Singapore reveals an industry very much in the early phases of development. There is enough technical proficiency for studios to compete on the international stage for work on commercials, music videos, mobile content, video games, HD documentaries and animated TV series.

"I believe with the Singapore government's support and the excitement that is brewing in

a local animation context, Singapore will be a perfect location for outsourcing because of language, attitude and cost," says Jason Low, associate director of Yellow Brick Road, a boutique agency that works on interactive and educational online projects.

So far, much of the work is technical rather than creative, with many houses operating with small staffs of animators. Most Singapore studios are finding talent either locally or regionally, and augmenting their schooling with on-the-job training. The demand is still high for both all-around generalists and those with specific skills.

"We still lack many talents and do hope to see more young artists come out and create good work both for 2D and 3D animation," says Low Jun Jek, creative director of Yolk, which has produced animation for MTV Asia and MediaCorp Singapore.

"Technical directors are really lacking. Effects, animation and rendering TDs are almost non-existent in the open market," says Tony Sealy, managing director of Intense Animation Studio, which operates a school as well as do-



Aldric Chang



Calvin Tng



Jason Low



Lucasfilm's *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*



Light & Shadows' TV series OddSox



Wizard of Oz characters by Yellow Brick Road.



Mediafreaks Katakune.



Omen Studios' original mini-series Aegis Action.

Southern Star Singapore's
The Adventures of Bottle Top Bill

ing commercial work for Saatchi & Saatchi, Tiger Beer and Sony Ericsson.

Max Lim of 3D graphics and animation house Sixtrees says people with game creation skills are hard to come by.

Many credit the Lucasfilm facility with drawing attention to animation in Singapore and inspiring more people to seek out careers in the field. While Lucasfilm pulls upon the talent pool, local execs welcome the attention the company brings to the industry.

Tang Chi Sim



Tony Sealy

Calvin Tng, business director of Light & Shadows, a veteran animation house in operation for

13 years, says having Lucasfilm in Singapore does three things for the local industry. "First, everyone knows about, or more of, Singapore and her animators' potential," he says. "Second, the general skill sets and knowledge (including management) will improve. Third, the interest level of financiers, studios and distributors would increase."

Developing the industry into one that can support itself and thrive both in the technical and creative worlds over the long term is a tougher issue that remains to be resolved. Cracking the competitive international market—

especially selling original IP to U.S. clients—requires keeping costs down and developing a deep pool of talent both from within Singapore and from abroad.

"Everyone has a plan for entering the U.S. market with original content, but because of the high competitive barriers there, the success rate has been quite low," says Tang Chi Sim, managing director of Omens Animation Studios. "However, getting reasonably paying commercial work from the U.S.A. market has not been too difficult. For a studio like ours, we get about 50 percent of our work from U.S.A. clients." The two-year-old studio has produced 3D animation and cinematics for game makers like THQ and EA, as well as for commercials and Disney TV series.

"We are committed to developing our own properties," says Sealy. "The markets we are interested in are the European and U.S. markets as our properties are distinctly Western in style.

TV commercials and facilities-based business is not a long-term strategy for Intense."

Developing a skilled labor force is one thing; keeping them may turn out to be another. With India and China nearby, it's likely that cheaper labor costs will lure away some of the animation jobs Singapore is trying to develop.

"There seems to be more facilities-based work being done lately, but this is shortsighted as the labor costs in Singapore will always be higher than India or China," says Sealy.

There are some signs of locally originated content. Vividtree is working on content it plans to sell at this year's Cannes market and Mediafreaks has produced its own preschool series, Katakune.

Where and how the industry will grow from here is a tough question to answer. The government funding and support only goes so far—to reach maturity, the industry must grow into the role it sees for itself on the international market.

"Right now, we are receiving a lot of support from the Singapore government. But it is clear that this support cannot last forever," says Aldric Chang, founder and managing director of Mediafreaks. "The answer may not be in animation itself, but rather in areas related to animation—such as character development and licensing."

Jacqueline Chan, GM for Southern Star Singapore, also expects a change in emphasis. "As the industry matures, we expect to see a greater shift toward pre- and post-production being done here," she says.

But the optimism and flexibility of Singapore's business community evokes high hopes for the future. "I hope to see Oscar-nominated productions coming out from Singapore in five years!" says Tng. ■

Thomas J. McLean is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in animation, visual effects and comic books. He also writes the comic-book blog *Bags and Board* (http://we-blogs.variety.com/bags_and_board).



Images: ©2007 Shirow Masamune/SEISINSHA - Ex Machina Film Partners

The Third Harvest of Appleseed

Our reporter uncovers the true nature of Shinji Aramaki's acclaimed reboot of the Appleseed saga, which comes out on DVD and Blu-ray this month. **by Patrick Drazen**

It's not a sequel, and it's not a remake; maybe we should call it a remix. Whatever it is, *Appleseed: Ex Machina* (Ekusu makina) extends the story of Olympus, the post-Apocalyptic city of the future where humans live with cyborgs and "bioroids," everyone deals with terrorists and perfection isn't what it's cracked up to be.

Released in Japanese theaters in 2007, *Appleseed: Ex Machina* arrives on these shores in March through Warner Home Video. The movie continues the story of feisty future-cop Deunan Knute, rescued from the wasteland with her partner/lover Briareos, whose body was so far gone he had to be turned cyborg. These Olympus outsiders defend the city on orders from the elusive mayor Athena, without always knowing exactly what they're defending or why.

It's no surprise that such questions should come up. *Appleseed* was one of the first manga successes of Masamune Shirow, who asked similar questions in his hit manga *Ghost in the Shell*. The first *Appleseed* anime was produced in 1988 by a fairly new studio named Gainax; *Evangelion* was still years away, and its Old School roots still show. In 2004 a CG-animated *Appleseed* feature hit movie screens, and, despite the radically different look, anime fans responded favorably.

Appleseed: Ex Machina was directed by Shinji Aramaki, who made his directorial debut with the 2004 film. However, he's long been a familiar anime name as a mecha designer. Not a common job title in western animation, the mecha design-

er is responsible for the "look" of vehicles, armor, weapons—and sometimes combinations of some or all of the above. Aramaki's designs have been seen in *Genesis Climber MOSPEADA* (which got folded into the *Robotech* saga on U.S. television) and both the made-for-video *Bubblegum Crisis* (1987-1991) and its rebirth as a weekly TV series, *Bubblegum Crisis: Tokyo 2040* (1998-1999).

Meanwhile, Aramaki began experimenting with CG. "Back in 1985 or so, I purchased a personal computer—an NEC 9801," he notes. "Compared to the abilities of modern computers it was almost like a pocket calculator. It could only display eight colors on screen. Eight colors! But it had a primitive wire-frame generation program, an early version of modern CAD programs. I taught myself to do some wire-frame animation, and eventually I was able to apply the things I learned to my later films." He says one reason he directed the 2004 *Appleseed* was because at that point the technology had finally caught up. "I think that if you look at facial expressions, at what we're now able to convey with those, we're definitely a step further. You shouldn't look for it in the big action scenes,

but rather in the way people appear, the way their face looks ... It's now far more detailed."

This time around, Shirow's manga world was reworked in a script by Kiyoto Takeuchi. Besides the bothersome problem of zombified citizens attacking Olympus, Deunan and Briareos get caught up in a messy triangle. The third player is Tereus, a bioroid who's not only based on Briareos's DNA but looks disturbingly like the pre-cyborg Briareos. It's the kind of clever twist that would be at home in *Ghost in the Shell*.

"I had Masamune Shirow offering advice on one side, and [the film's producer, action film giant] John Woo on the other, and of course I had my own vision of how the film should be as well. In the end, however, both of them respected my position as director and left the final decisions completely in my hands."

Musically, the movie looks to the 1980s, reuniting the influential Japanese synth-pop trio Yellow Magic Orchestra (including Ryuichi Sakamoto, whose score for *The Last Emperor* won an Academy Award). Also on hand are Japanese deejay Towa Tei, spinmaster for the pop group Deee-Lite, and avant-garde singer/musician Cornelius. It's easy to think of this score as retro-future.

The film's score also led to a costume change. The film's music producer, Shin Yasui, knew a Japanese clothing designer whose work was admired by superstar designer Miuccia Prada. Consequently, Deunan gets to drop the body armor and wear two Prada originals designed for the movie. "Everything just fell into place," Aramaki laughs; "even I was surprised. Why is this coming together so easily?" ■



Warner Bros. Home Entertainment will release *Appleseed: Ex Machina* as a single-disc Standard Edition (\$24.98), a two-disc Steelbook Collector's Edition (which features audio commentary by the filmmakers and a detailed look at the CG animation technology, \$34.98) and on HD and Blu-ray (\$34.99).

The Samurai Critic:

Reviews of the Latest Anime DVD Releases

by Charles Solomon



Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle (2005) was one of the most eagerly anticipated *shōjo* (girl's) series of recent years. A blend of mystery, enchantment, romance, adventure and self-sacrifice, this picaresque tale offers new adventures for characters adapted from the popular 1998 offering, *Cardcaptor Sakura*.

That show followed 10-year-old Sakura Kinomoto as she recaptured the magical cards created by the great wizard Clow Reed. Taiwanese exchange student Syaoran Li initially vied with Sakura for the cards, but as the series progressed, he became her ally, then her boyfriend.

Tsubasa preserves the looks and personalities of the characters, but the relationships have shifted. Sakura and Syaoran have been redesigned as teenagers: She's the Princess of the Kingdom of Clow, he's the hard-working son of a famous archaeologist. Sakura's older brother Toya rules the kingdom, with his best friend Yukito serving as magus/advisor to the king.

When Sakura visits an ancient temple Syaoran and his father have been excavating, a mysterious power takes control of the princess. Her spirit manifests itself as a pair of graceful white wings that shatter, sending the feathers of her memories flying through time and space.

The enchanted feathers must be restored to the princess or she will die. Syaoran asks Yūko the Dimensional Witch for the power to travel to other dimensions to capture the feathers. In return, Yūko demands he sacrifice what he holds most dear—he can restore all of Sakura's memories except the ones of him. Yūko launches him through space and time with Sakura and three new characters: Kurogane, a hot-tempered warrior; Fay, a rather fey

wizard and Mokona, a rabbit-like creature who can be insufferably cute.

As the characters move from one world to another, they discover the power of the enchanted feathers. Tambal, an arrogant ex-magician, uses one to rule the Land of Nayutaya. After defeating Tambal, Syaoran sees the dark side of his

season nears its conclusion, the artists suggest more serious threats lie ahead: A princess they rescue warns, "Someone is always watching you." Fei Wang Reed and his assistant Xing Huo, whose powers are only hinted at, watch every move Sakura and Syaoran make. They and their friends may be nothing more than pawns in a struggle between Fei Wang and Yūko.

The filmmakers clearly had a much larger budget for *Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle* than they did for *Cardcaptor Sakura*. Director Koichi Mashimo and his artists employ fresh and imaginative visuals that maintain the look of the original manga by the four-woman studio CLAMP. In Outo, Syaoran's spirit is embodied in his *kudan*, a wolf-like guardian spirit that recalls the Patronus protectors in the *Harry Potter* books. Syaoran uses it to battle a monster that resembles a giant Chinese doll, rather than a standard-issue anime monster. In the Country of Jade, the adventurers follow

a legend through images that suggest stained glass windows.

Some of the most striking visuals occur at the end of the first season, when the five seekers encounter Seishiro, a human Syaoran had known in the Clow Kingdom. Using one of Sakura's feathers, Seishiro causes Outo to implode, revealing that the world of the demon-hunters was just an elaborate virtual reality game.

Although there's a strong romantic element to Syaoran's devotion to Sakura, *Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle* disproves the received wisdom that boys won't watch a series about girls. Who can resist a tale this intriguing? ■



bargain with Yūko. When he presents Sakura with the feather, she can't see him at the birthday party she recalls, only his empty chair. But his dedication to the quest never wavers.

Visions of a Sightless World

In the demon-haunted country of Outo, Syaoran asks Kurogane to teach him to use a sword. His first lessons involve learning not to rely on vision but on the inner senses he's developed to compensate for being blind in one eye. When Kurogane blindfolds Syaoran, the filmmakers effectively suggest his sightless world with reversed colors and evocative music.

During their first adventures, the quintet battle relatively minor foes that hold power in a single realm. But as the first

**Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle,
Vols. 1-6**
[FUNimation: \$29.98 each]

Anime Comes Up for Air

What's hot, what's not, and what's having a heck of a hard time surviving in the Japanese TV animation landscape in 2008. **by Tad Osaki**

TOKYO—After taking quantum leaps for decades, the Japanese animation industry is in a quandary, or at least experiencing a watershed period where key players are re-examining their market perspectives and directions.

One of the major factors affecting the TV animation business is the slashing of available primetime real estate for serial anime on free-to-air terrestrial networks. As variety shows continue to get more viewers and ad revenues continue to slip, the average viewer has seen fewer anime titles on commercial networks of late. Most of the anime shows grabbing top ratings are long-running family sitcom-like titles such as *Sazae-san*—which first began as a manga in 1946—and *Chibi Maruko-chan*, another anime featuring a sarcastic grade school girl (is there another kind?), which both air on Fuji-TV on Sunday nights.

While anime distribution to cable, satellite and mobile media is in fact on an upswing—with Kids Station subscribers nearing 8 million and Animax exceeding 7 million—revenues from these non-traditional media have yet to compensate for the loss suffered from once lucrative network slots.

Tokyo Metropolitan TV (MXTV), Tokyo's only UHF station, is recently known for its aggressive display of anime shows, with 34 shows a week, though most of titles shown on the channel are reruns of old shows, or material that is not strong enough to be bought by networks but is within the tighter budget of MXTV.

As Masao Kurosu, exec producer of Nippon Animation, points out, "Even the late-night slots that offered low purchase prices but were used as the venue to promote DVD/video fare are now getting difficult to



The Flowers of Hard Blood (Fuji TV)

secure because of the recent slow movement of DVD sales."

The situation is not quite promising in overseas markets, either. Kurosu says the U.S. market is now a buyers' market as companies are taking advantage of the abundance of Japanese titles that flooded the States' terrestrial and cable/specialty channels to get lower prices. In China and several other Asian and European countries, the governments' preference for locally produced shows is gradually taking its toll on Japanese imports. At the same time, heavy protectionist policy in these countries is encouraging more domestic anime houses to come out with their own, indigenous shows for their own media, Kurosu adds.

Undaunted by the adverse situation, however, both animation houses and networks are grasping for ways to revive the glory of Japanese animation. TV Tokyo, the home of global favorites such as *Pokémon* and *Naruto*, is still maintaining its unique format of 35 anime shows a week—13 weekend morning shows, 12 evening prime-time shows and 10 late-night programs, all of which are heavily promoted by TV Tokyo's anime website, AniTele.

Although many of these shows are familiar fare such as *Pokémon*, *Naruto* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, TV Tokyo has high hopes for its upcoming new show *Soul Eater*, which will premiere in April. The half-hour Square Enix anime, written



Soul Eater (TV Tokyo)

by Atsushi Okubo for the manga monthly *GanGan* since 2004, is unique in that it is shown twice a week: first on Monday at 6 p.m., then on Friday at 2:15 a.m., explains Yukio Kawasaki, manager of international licensing for animation business at TV Tokyo. The show is set to run for 52 weeks, in hopes of following the successful footsteps of *Full Metal Alchemist*, according to Kawasaki. *Soul Eater* is a retelling of one of the four great Chinese classic novels set in the Song Dynasty, but in a contemporary setting.

TV Tokyo also continues pushing its overseas plans. The outfit's *Naruto*, the 2002 blockbuster ninja anime, has swept the world with the exception of very few territories such as North Korea and Mongolia. Other new titles include *Blue Dragon* (created by Akira Toriyama of *Dragon Ball* fame), which is set to premiere on Cartoon Network next month.

While other commercial networks are sticking with tried-and-true anime titles, Nippon TV delivered rocking ratings with its new toon *Yatterman*, which has been one of the top five most-watched shows since it debuted in January in the 7 p.m. slot. The series is a remake of an original Fuji TV series (1977-1979) penned by the



late Tatsuo Yoshida, and centers on good-guy robots in pursuit of a trio of thieves.

Meanwhile, Japan's ratings and revenue leader Fuji TV airs six anime titles a week—*Sazae-san*, *Chibi Maruko-chan*, *One Piece* and the legendary 1959 supernatural anime, *GeGeGe no Kitaro*, as well as two new titles: *Hakaba* (Graveyard) *Kitaro*, based on the original manga by Shigeru Mizuki, and another late night Saturday show, *The Flowers of Hard Blood*, a suspense anime about a fe-

anime version of the popular drama, *Dae Jang Geum* about the 16th century Korean royal court saga that aired on Japan's Educational Channel on Saturday mornings in 2004. The *Story of Saiunkoku* (The Land of Colored Clouds) is produced by Madhouse Studios and is based on Sai Yukino's popular book series, which has sold over 3.5 million copies to date.

Animated by the team at Production I.G, *Guardian of the Sacred Spirit* is the

“Even the late-night slots that offered low purchase prices but were used as the venue to promote DVD/video fare, are now getting difficult to secure because of the recent slow movement of DVD sales.”

—Masao Kurosu, Nippon Animation's exec producer

male chess player set in the late 1950s.

NHK, the country's powerhouse public broadcaster, carries more than 20 anime titles a week, spread over its two terrestrial and three satellite channels, as well as five-minute anime shorts spread throughout its programming. Among the major NHK anime titles are *Ôban Star-Racers*, *Janggeum's Dream*, *The Story of Saiunkoku* and *Guardian of the Sacred Spirit*.

Janggeum's Dream is the Korean MBC

first chapter of the *Moribito* (Guardian) fantasy series, written by Nahoko Uehashi for publishing house KAISEI-SHA between 1996 and 2007. The first English-language translation of the book is expected to be published by Arthur A. Levine Books/Scholastic in the summer of 2008.

NHK also continues to air Japanese and foreign feature titles every month on its Sunday Anime Theater at 9 a.m. for the third year in a row.



Blue Dragon
(TV Tokyo)

The local anime industry is quietly pushing for more Government support, not exactly in the form of production subsidies that might infringe upon the freedom of expression, but in financial assistance to promote Japanese anime overseas, including fairs and exhibitions. One of the successful examples of this trend is the growing popularity of Tokyo International Anime Fair—The 2008 edition will take place at Tokyo's Big Sight, March 27-30. Last year, TAF attracted 270 exhibitors and recorded a turnout of 107,713.

Another positive development is the growth of college-level anime courses offered by various institutes in the country. Following the example of four private colleges, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts, the oldest state-run institution for arts and music, recently added an anime department to its graduate-level offerings. It remains to be seen if and when Japanese animation will regain its leadership in the world market. However, judging from the various new animated productions and activities seen in the country in recent months, there are plenty of silver linings on the horizon. ■

Tad Osaki is *Animation Magazine's* Tokyo-based correspondent. He has covered the entertainment business for various trade publications in the past two decades.



How to Manufacture Mammoth Mayhem

VFX supervisor Karen Goulekas discusses the wild and wooly world of Roland Emmerich's *10,000 B.C.*

by Ron Magid

Ever since Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* first roared upon the silver screen in 1993, moviegoers have become accustomed to seeing rampaging dinosaurs on a regular basis at the movies. But what about those other very real horrors of the prehistoric era? Mammals finally get the respect they deserve in Roland Emmerich's latest, *10,000 B.C.*, whose title echoes the famous 1966 Raquel Welch showpiece *One Million Years B.C.* This time it's not scantily clad cave people vs. brontosaurs, but scantily clad cave people vs. mammoths, saber-toothed tigers, terror birds and more.

Herding the mammoth mayhem is visual effects supervisor Karen Goulekas, an Emmerich collaborator since 1998's *Godzilla* who later worked on the helmer/producer's *Eight Legged Freaks* before tackling the director's last outing, *The Day After Tomorrow*, for which she won a BAFTA.

But bringing Stone Age creatures into the digital age required even greater

skill and bleeding edge techniques. One of the first casualties: storyboards. Goulekas hired UK-based boutique Nvizage to start digital pre-viz in October 2005 after the movie was greenlit. Soon the pre-viz, which could respond rapidly to script changes, made storyboards obsolete. "Roland and I would discuss the new script pages, then I would break it up into beats from a bird's eye view and start blocking cam-

"In pre-viz, we made our mammoths gallop, which looked really cool, but then we learned elephants don't gallop—they run!"

—Karen Goulekas, vfx supervisor, *10,000 B.C.*

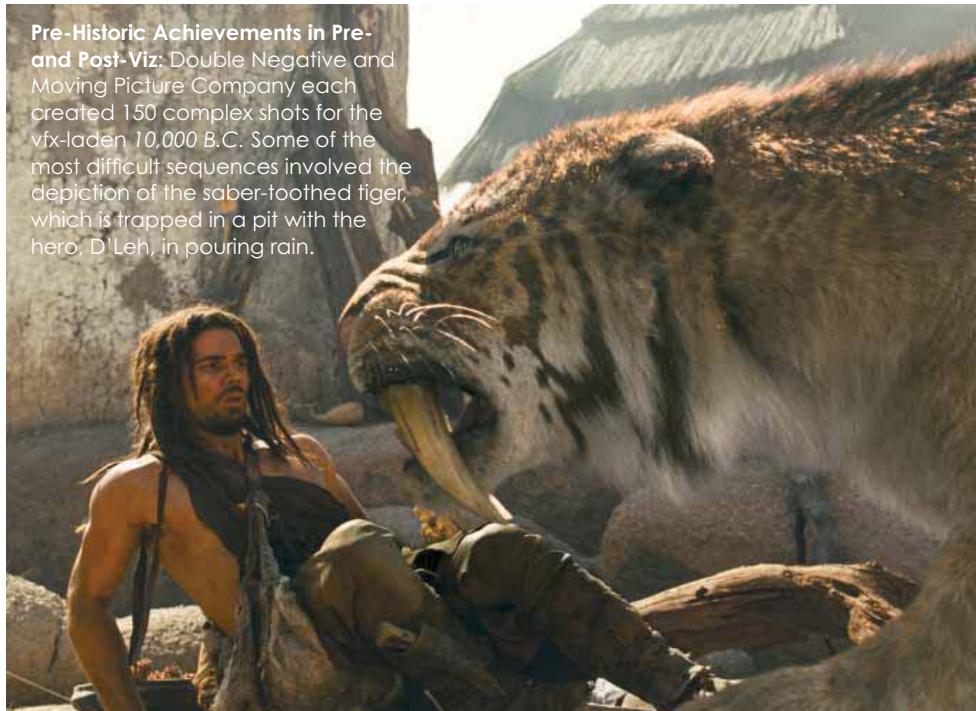
era angles," Goulekas says. "I would show Roland the results and he would have lots of ideas on camera angles and beats that we would address. Then my editor and I would start cutting it together and it would just get born."

When Goulekas insisted that Nvizage provide 13 talented character animators, three or four asset builders and a

visual effects editor, "Their jaws about fell to the ground." She says, "We pre-vized until we left for our shoot in April 2006, so we had pretty complete sequences that were fantastic because we did them over and over."

Goulekas then took half a dozen pre-viz artists to location. Why? "Like any animated, character-driven film, how do you actually put an edit together without having some animation in there?" she asks. "We used our pre-viz as post-viz, we had five animators and a compositor—actually my husband—doing camera tracking and so on." That way, as Emmerich and editor Alex Berner began cutting plates, they could see the action develop within each shot and sequence. "I built up a big in-house team of Nvizage people to continue doing the post-viz, which became something we could send to the vendors."

Post-viz is nothing new for Goulekas, who first coined the term on *Day After Tomorrow* when blocking that film's complex weather interactions, and the doubling up is more comparable to cel animation, where pencil tests are the quick and dirty means of getting ideas across before the final animation is done. Twice the work (arguably) creates infi-



nitely better results. "It's an evolutionary thing," Goulekas believes. "Post-viz was easily a year and a half, and was still going for another four months during post-production in London."

Five effects houses wrangled 10,000 B.C.'s 641 digital shots, including The Senate (105), Machine (104) and in-house wire removal and composite team 10 BC (192). The most complex were split evenly between Double Negative and Moving Picture Company with 150 3D shots apiece. Two pre-viz artists became Goulekas' animation supervisors: Greg Fisher worked

with MPC's visual effects supervisor Nicolas Aithadi, while Robert Hemmings oversaw Double Negative's work under Swedish vfx supervisor Jesper Kjölsrud. "We'd already worked together for over a year, so they knew what I wanted," Goulekas says.

The opening mammoth-hunting sequence, with over 300 18-foot-tall pachyderms covered in lanky dreadlocks, was orchestrated by MPC. Some renders topped out at 15 hours, and the semi-procedural hair program occasionally produced some outrageous results. "They were a little poofy looking

at first," Goulekas admits.

And unlike dinosaurs, real life was sometimes at odds with the dramatic animation of the characters. "In pre-viz, we made our mammoths gallop, which looked really cool—but then we learned elephants don't gallop, they run," Goulekas sighs.

But 10,000 B.C.'s toughest challenge fell to Double Negative: creating a believable saber-toothed tiger, trapped with the hero, D'Leh, in a pit in pouring rain. "The tiger is struggling, pinned under logs and branches, so we had close-ups of this animal thrashing in the rising water," Goulekas says. "We had to make its fur interact with the water. Double Negative would decide, shot for shot, if they wanted to replace all the water on the surface or just part of it, depending on whether the water was interacting with our actor."

Both the digital water and hair were procedural, so the odds of something going horribly awry were, well, hairy. The trick was hiding the intersection of hair and water with foam and spray. As Goulekas explains, "That way, you're just seeing the hair get slick when his head goes under and clumpy when it comes back up. It took a while to get there, but nothing blew up on us. I always said that was going to be the hardest part of the movie, and it was."

In the world of 10,000 B.C., just creating great animation wasn't enough. The finishing work on the mammoths, the saber-toothed tiger and even the ostrich-like terror birds was always waiting to sabotage the efforts of Goulekas' team, whose creatures were never really out of the woods until they were rendered. "It was a nail-biter," Goulekas says. "Everyone definitely had their hands full, but they pulled it off." ■

Warner Bros' 10,000 B.C. will open in U.S. theaters on March 7 and roll out in various European, Latin American and Asian territories throughout the month.

Digital Magic

by Christopher Grove



Super Bowl's Screaming Animals and Zune's Dog in Space

I'm not sure exactly when analyzing Super Bowl commercials became a national obsession, but I think it was way back in the day when the Mean Joe Greene Coca-Cola ad caused such a stir in 1979. That was five years before the much-discussed touchstone of Super Bowl advertising, 1984's Apple Big Brother spot.

The good news about this year's crop: No rocks were thrown at people's heads. The bad news: Super Bowl XLII was so good most people I watched with just wanted to get back to the game and skip the hype. But even if the game had sucked, it would be hard to argue that the 2008 crop yielded any classic, pop-culture phrases such as in past years ("Nothin' but net!" "I'm going to Disneyworld!" etc.). And once again it was ads that featured some heavy CGI work that were among the best work—Federal Express's Pigeons, Budweiser's Rocky homage, Coca Cola's Balloons, E*TRADE's Baby and Bridgestone Tire's Squirrel. Complex dialogue, as Jeff Goodby, co-chairman at Goodby Silverstein & Partners said recently, is the enemy of a successful ad. And the Squirrel spot's extended scream is both simple and funny. If they didn't have enough business already, Dallas-based The Richards Group should get even more action from this. Same goes for Santa Monica-based Method Studios which did all the CGI work on the spot. In the words of legendary ad man Jerry Della Femina: "Make us laugh, or we'll kill you."

Putting Laika in Orbit

Zune-Arts.net continues to be a destination for animators either wanting to showcase their work or see some of the best experimental stuff out there. Case-in-point, the new short *Laika* animated by Curious Pictures' Ro Rao. It's a fanciful take on the fate of the first dog in space. Launched on a Soviet rocket 50 years ago, mission control soon lost contact with the vehicle. Rao's film is a fantasy about the fate of the brave dog. It incorporates a range of



2D and 3D photographic elements and textures.

The film begins with archival footage of Laika, integrated with Rao's signature graphic style into what appears to be a Russian newspaper. "We liked the idea of using the real story of Laika as a springboard as well as starting with the last documented second of her life—the moment her rocket disappeared into the ether," says writer Charlie Stephenson of ad, design and branding agency 72andSunny.

Far from meeting a horrible death, the film imagines Laika traveling through clouds of dog biscuits and landing on a magical planet. "We wanted to take the realistic story from the first 10 seconds and go into a land of pure fantasy—the idea of the ultimate dog planet," says Rao. Laika lands on a brilliantly colored world filled with everything a dog could want—trees made of meat covered in Spanish Moss made from bacon, a river of peanut butter, ferns that toss Frisbees and hands that grow out of the ground at the right angle for easy belly rub action.

The film was created with a combination of stop-motion and After Effects work. "We spent a day shooting stills of tons of dogs," Rao says. "We covered them in various poses, doing a wide range of activities—walking, jumping, running, romping and sitting." To create the dog biscuit rings around the planet, Rao attached a dog bone to a drill bit and then shot it in stop motion to create an organic look." The film is set against a rock and roll soundtrack by the band

The Aliens. "Ro did a great job of turning a melancholy topic into an inspiring story about sharing and friendship," says Ste-

phenson. "Plus he's the first Zune Arts artist to create a tree made entirely out of meat."

Gameloft Corners the Touch-Screen Market

On any given day there's lots of news about the burgeoning mobile game world. So here's this month's pick: Gameloft is aggressively expanding its mobile games made especially for iPhone-type touch-screen handsets. Using the company's expertise from developing stylus-based games for the Nintendo DS, Gameloft has sought out ways to best utilize the touch screens which, the company claims, transform game play into a more intuitive experience by removing the limitations of a small keyboard.

"The hype for 2008 will focus on the emergence of these new handsets," says Michel Guillemot, president and CEO of Gameloft. "This is a new step in terms of development, one that leads us to rethink how we approach our game controls so that players can interact directly with the screen and get a greater gaming experience. Touch-screen games are perfect examples of how modern technology can advance the gaming industry."

Gameloft already has more than 15 touch screen games in its catalogue, including Brain Challenge 2, Chessmaster, Paris Hilton's Diamond Quest, Sexy Poker Manga, Deal or No Deal, Shrek the Third, Real Football: Manager Edition and CSI Miami. These games were developed for the first touch screen mobile phones available on the market. Gameloft's touch-screen games were initially developed in Java, though some will also be developed on the Windows Mobile platform. The creation of touch-screen games is part of Gameloft's overall effort to make all of its games accessible to every commercially available phone model on the market. ■

Chris Grove is a Los Angeles-based actor and journalist who specializes in visual effects and new media.





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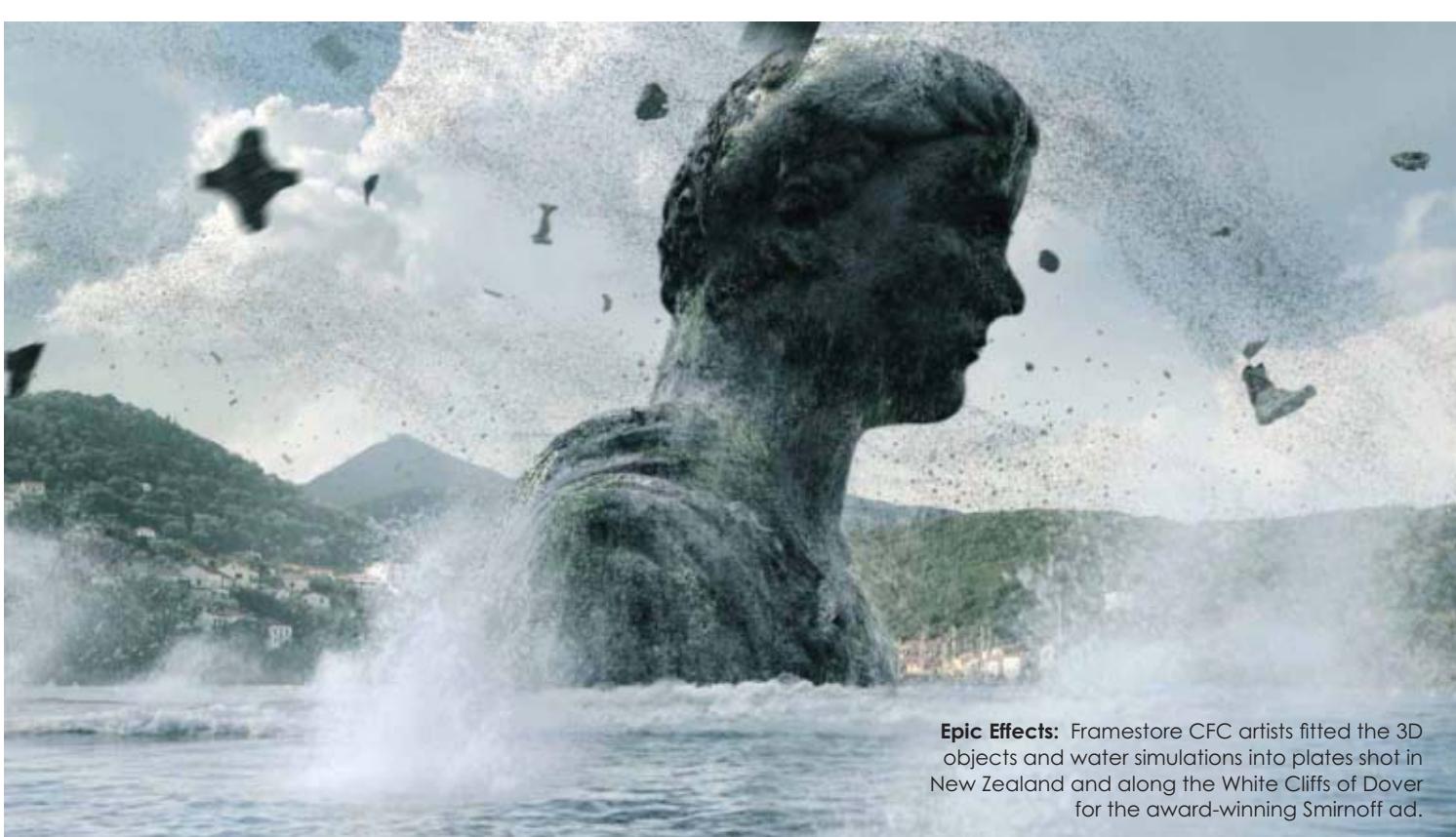
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Liquid Gold

Smirnoff and Bacardi's award-winning TV spots push CG technologies and deliver moments of pure poetic beauty. *by Barbara Robertson*

Two enticing commercials for competing distillers of mood-enhancing liquid refreshment, Smirnoff and Bacardi, made a giant splash among the Visual Effects Society nominees this year.

In Bacardi's *Born in the Sun* spot, a beautifully lit curl of liquid filmed against a dark background transforms into a glowing dancer who slowly unfolds, turns toward camera and releases a brilliant sun spot that explodes with golden color. Sparks shoot out from the sun flare and streak across the dark sky pulling silvery, watery trails behind. Each spark becomes a shimmering dancer and we see thousands of dancers floating behind a large, central watery figure. Then, they all slide deep into space; spots of golden light that coalesce into a giant sun. The sun becomes a highlight on a bottle of Bacardi. The tag line: Born in the sun. London-based Moving Picture Company handled post-production on the Blink Ink spot, which Michel Metenier

er of Pleix directed.

MPC started by painting two nearly naked dancers coated with black makeup and filming them in a Majorca car park at 2,000 frames per second. "It was a strange sight," says Robin Carlisle, visual effects supervisor. "We threw buckets of water on them as they did the dance moves."

Back at the studio, modelers began with laser scans of the dancers to create 3D models that they rigged in Maya. Animators then manipulated the 3D models to match the slow movement of the dancers on the film, which they played back at regular speed. Then, they filled a shell inside the animated 3D models with digital Bacardi and used RealFlow simulations to move the liquid inside as the digital characters danced.

By compositing the resulting liquid characters with the splashes of water filmed on location, they gave the edges a watery look. "When we painted out the

Epic Effects: Framestore CFC artists fitted the 3D objects and water simulations into plates shot in New Zealand and along the White Cliffs of Dover for the award-winning Smirnoff ad.

black bodies, all we could see in Flame was the water spray that we composited onto our 3D models," Carlisle says. "No one wanted a defined silhouette."

The digital water matched the photographed elements thanks to HDRI lighting reference taken on set and water shaders rendered through mental ray. "I've found that any time you have something real in a plate, even if it's only 10 percent of a shot, it helps make everything real," Carlisle says.

To create the sparks and the glowing trails of light behind, the crew used a combination of RealFlow simulations and Maya particle effects. The thousands of liquid dancers at the end were mostly sprites—tiny renders of the liquid characters attached to particles. Compositors added the brilliant lighting effects in Flame.

All Clear Now

Smirnoff's *Sea* starts with a fishing trawler in a dark and stormy sea. The fisherman tips a can to get the last drop, crushes it with his hand and tosses it into the ocean. The can flies back out of the water and hits him. The water boils. The camera dives to the bottom of the sea to show us why: Dozens of vortexes are shooting coins out of the water.

continued on page 26

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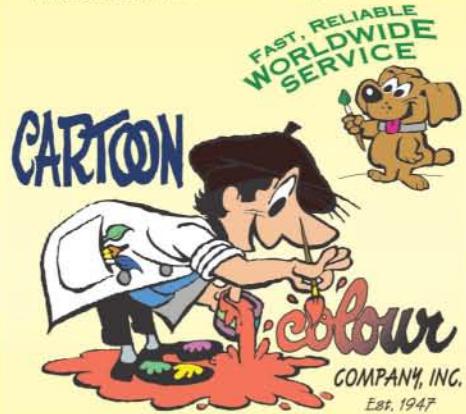
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Commercials

continued from page 26

Back above water, we see an oil rig, again in a dark and stormy sea. A worker watches in amazement as a World War II-era airplane lifts up from beneath the water followed by more war craft, helicopters, containers, appliances, nuts, bolts, an ancient statue, a stone foot. Debris fills the sky; detritus litters the White Cliffs of Dover. The camera pans past a battleship tossed against the cliffs. The sky clears and the sun comes out and the camera cranes toward the ocean, which has become crystalline blue. The words "Extraordinary Purification, Ten times filtered, Triple distilled" overlay the water first, and then a bottle of Smirnoff and the words "Clearly Smirnoff" appear as the water becomes nearly transparent. It all happens in 30 seconds.

"The scale was epic," says William Bartlett, vfx supervisor at Framestore CFC, which handled the post-production for the J Walter Thompson spot directed by Daniel Kleinman. "We had to do wall-to-wall film style effects on a commercial budget."

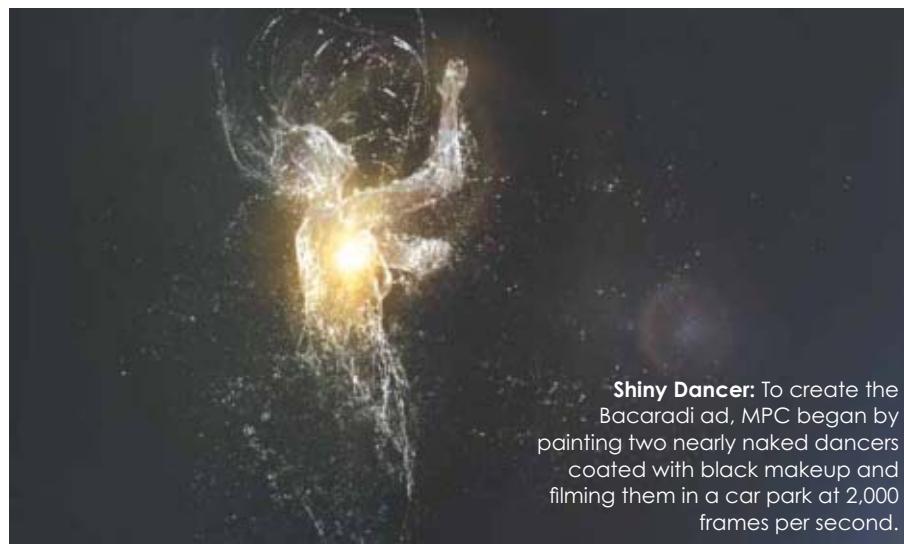
"[Houdini's] Mantra enables you to drop out umpteen textures and environment reflections from one render, so we could try different ideas."

—Dan Seddon, post-production director on Framestore CFC's Smirnoff Sea commercial

To stay within budget, Bartlett first sorted out how best to create the shots. For example, rather than hiring a helicopter to shoot a real oil rig in the North Sea or building a miniature or 3D model, Bartlett cleverly assembled the rig in Inferno from bits of photos he took on location in Auckland, New Zealand. "The shot didn't need much perspective change," he says, "and it wasn't too close, so I cobbled the shot out of backs of boats and cranes."

On the other hand, the water in all the shots and the junk shooting out of the water is nearly always CG. Dan Seddon handled the post-production at Framestore CFC, fitting 3D objects and water simulations into plates shot in New Zealand and alongside the White Cliffs of Dover.

"We modeled a little bit of every-



Shiny Dancer: To create the Bacardi ad, MPC began by painting two nearly naked dancers coated with black makeup and filming them in a car park at 2,000 frames per second.

thing," he says. "Spitfire planes, a Lancaster, a battleship, crates, old cars, bits of boats. We had to texture up and smash so many 3D models that we looked for models from previous commercials for the smaller bits further away. And then of course on top of that, we needed dynamics to throw things around."

For dynamics, the crew used Houdini; for the models and some of the water effects, Maya. "We used a range of

ing when it lands on top of the cliff or onto something else. From a 3D person's point of view, it was a cool thing to do, smashing things into each other."

For other shots, the crew used simpler techniques. "We'd give the Inferno guys a model spinning from one camera angle that we rendered out," Seddon says. "It looked 3D, but it was actually 2D. We also made a little tornado effect by instancing lightweight geometry to create thousands upon thousands of little objects. We used all the tricks."

For the final shot in which the water becomes nearly transparent, the crew rendered numerous lighting passes in Mantra of the Houdini-generated 3D water. "Mantra enables you to drop out umpteen textures and environment reflections from one render, so we could try different ideas," Seddon says. To simulate caustics, the refraction of light bending through an object, they projected the sea onto a ground plane that they then used as a texture. "We projected the same displacement shaders that made the sea onto the surface, and created the effect without ray tracing."

MPC's clever planning and sophisticated work resulted in the spot winning the VES Award this year for Outstanding Visual Effects in a Commercial.

"The project was quite good," Seddon says. "It enabled guys to do things they hadn't done before." ■

Barbara Robertson is a Los Angeles-based writer who specializes in visual effects and CG technology.

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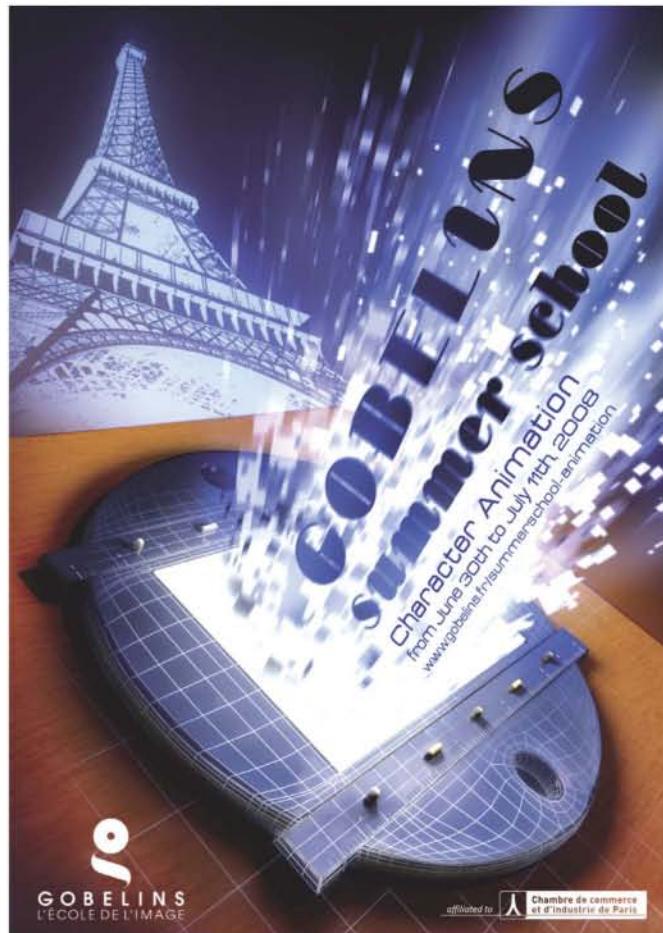
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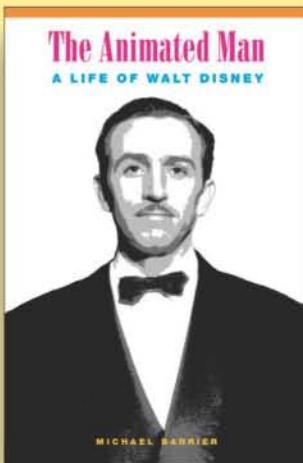


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Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry



Smith Micro's Poser 7

I remember back in the day when Poser was first released and everyone was promoting it as the best new thing in 3D. Created by artist and programmer Larry Weinberg as a software replacement for artists' mannequins, versions 1.0 and 2.0 were published by Fractal Design. They allowed the user to quickly create CG depictions of humans and position them, and essentially do what would take days in a more robust 3D program. There was lots of excitement, but there was also a certain degree of resistance in the industry from people who thought that the software just wasn't production-ready yet. (Yes, I was one of the those people!) However, I'm glad to report that it has grown up a lot in the last 10 years, and with the help of a pretty enormous client base, has developed into something far more robust.

Now here's the thing: It still isn't production-ready, but this is coming from an animation and visual effects studio

standpoint and not from the other gazillion people out there who create beautiful imagery every day. The people at e frontier recognize this, and have been very smart in targeting their primary demographic, and not trying to create a niche in the already crowded world of 3D software for film, TV and games.



That being said, let's go through the key advances they've implemented into Poser 7: First, new third-party content has been added into the already substantial library. New figures, poses, wildlife, motion-capture data, textures, etc. give the artist a definite foundation to start.

Animation has been in Poser for at least the last three iterations, now new functionality has been added including a robust lip sync engine called Talk Designer, tools for creating customize morph targets and animation layers—allowing me to mix and blend animations to create new ones, or isolate and save animations on different parts to be reused.

In Rendering and Lighting, Poser has sped up its engine and made it more efficient, but what really makes it like one of the big boys is the incorporation of High Dynamic Range Imagery to light the scenes.

In my field, I probably would never see Poser used by one of my artists. But that doesn't take away from the power the tool offers. If we're having a conversation with someone in any other

industry, I would certainly put Poser in the packages to consider. When you have a piece of software that does most of what you need—storyboards, fine art, medical illustration, web design, etc.—and it sets you back \$249 rather than \$3,500, then you can easily say that Poser is well worth its weight in gold.

Website: <http://graphics.smithmicro.com/go/poser>

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Todd Sheridan Perry is the co-owner and vfx supervisor of Max Ink Productions. He can be reached at ducky@maxinkcafe.com.

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From CalArts Straight to the Annies: The Breakthrough Success of Hyun-min Lee

By Ellen Wolff

It sounds like a script for a happily-ever-after movie: A fledgling animator lands a place in the Masters program at CalArts and meets a teacher who's impressed by the student's idea for a very personal film. Within months of graduation, the student's film gets a top-drawer production polish—thanks to her teacher and his friends at Disney. The final result is so beautiful that it earns two Annie nominations: Best Animated Short, and Best Animation Artist for the student herself.

It may sound like a fairy tale, but that's exactly what happened to Hyun-min Lee and her 2D-animated film *The Chestnut Tree*. Lee, who graduated from CalArts last May, actually had little animation experience when she began studying there. She had only arrived from South Korea in 2000 to get an undergraduate degree in painting from Wesleyan University. But at CalArts she had the good fortune to take a character animation class taught by animator Bert Klein (*The Simpsons Movie*, *Fantasia 2000*). Klein loved the clarity of Lee's drawing, and he introduced her to veteran Disney animator Eric Goldberg. "I was doing a lot of work at the time with Eric on theme park projects," Klein explains. "Hyun-min was so talented that I got her involved."

This assignment gave Lee professional experience, but it also cut into production time for the student film that she was making in tribute to her late mother. Klein promised that he would help her fully realize her film, *The Chestnut Tree*, even after graduation. "It's a rare, emotional film, and we felt it should be taken as far as we could."

The "we" is Klein and his wife Jennifer Cardon Klein, whose own animation credits include *The Iron Giant*. Under their Picnic Pictures banner, the Kleins set about producing the highest quality version of *The Chestnut Tree* that they could. Lee even moved in with the couple for several months, using the computers in their living room to scan her drawings into Adobe Photoshop.

The hand of the artist is central to the appeal of *The Chestnut Tree*, whose elegant line draw-

ings swirl from one memory of a girl and her mother into another. Even after Lee's drawings were scanned, they were hand-painted one frame at a time and then composited with Adobe After Effects. "Hyun-min couldn't just click and fill," says Klein.

Lee also took the distinctive approach of choreographing the visuals using the sheet music of the Chopin piano piece that serves as the film's soundtrack. "I made the notation on the sheet music where I wanted things to happen, and the pianist played it accordingly," says Lee. She then transcribed the music on to exposure sheets, so the musical beats became the "dialogue" that drove the animation.

This is where the input of Eric Goldberg was especially helpful, notes Klein. "He and I previously worked together on the 'Rhapsody In Blue' segment of *Fantasia 2000*, where the visual movements matched what you heard in the music. Nobody can visualize movement to music as well as Eric, so we got him involved. Hyun-min



A young Hyun-min with her late mother, for whom she made *Chestnut Tree* as a tribute.

Fortune smiled again on Hyun-min's film when the Kleins bumped into Don Hahn, the Oscar-nominated producer of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*. After seeing *The Chestnut Tree* in progress, Hahn offered his help. He had worked previously on two Oscar-nominated shorts that had been set to music, *Lorenzo* and *The Little Matchgirl*, so Hahn brought an experienced eye to this project. "Don scrutinized every single frame and he could see when we were even a couple of frames off," says Klein. "His changes made a big difference."

Lee also notes, "Don Hahn helped us go through post-production in a professional way." Thanks to his Disney contacts, *The Chestnut Tree* benefited from top-notch post-production services at Technicolor, Buena Vista Film and Digital and Buena Vista Sound. "It was amazing," marvels Lee.

So Picnic Pictures came away with pristine prints of *The Chestnut Tree* that are now making the rounds on the festival circuit. Lee is currently collaborating with the Kleins on a new Hahn-produced short—that is, when she's not busy as an apprentice animator to Eric Goldberg at Disney. Word has it that Lee is the first Asian woman on Disney's 2D feature team, and Klein asserts, "She's a rising star."

Everyone involved with *The Chestnut Tree* knows that the planets rarely align this way for a first-time director. "Having taught at CalArts, I've seen lots of student projects and I know a lot of things can go wrong," says Klein. "And it's expensive. I don't think Jennifer and I would have embarked on this for just any film. Aside from how much we love working with Hyun-min, we knew this film deserved to be as special as it could be." ■

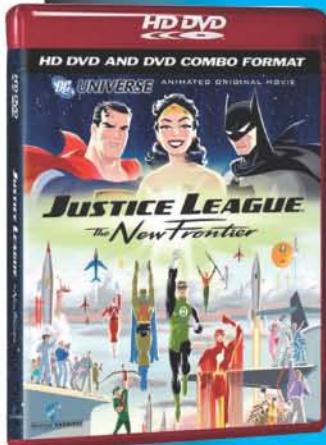
Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in education, animation and visual effects.



had the music recorded and we looked at the story reel and brainstormed about how to best match each shot to music. A lot of times people do the animation first and then put the music on, so this was kind of a throwback."



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[In the Next Issue of]

ANIMATION
MAGAZINE



* The Real Scoop on Nick's Mighty B!

* The New Rulers of the Irish Toon Scene

* The Best of MIPTV and NAB

* Fave Tech Tools/Toys of Animators

Toonz Animation CEO P. Jayakumar was kind enough to offer us a passage to India this month. With a slate which includes the new *Wolverine* and the *X-Men* animated show, the *Geet Mahabharat* TV series and the *Hanuman 2* feature project, the Kerala-based studio's animators have a lot to keep them busy through the day!

The
fun
begins
here !



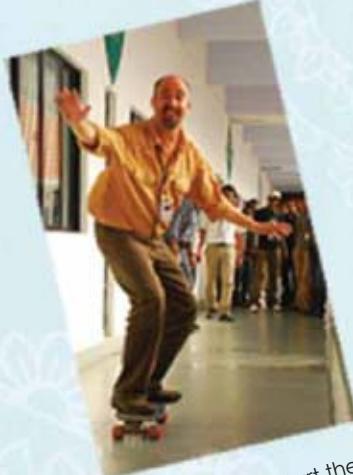
10:25 a.m.
Knights of the squiggly table: Dev, Baiju, Prasannan and Hari Varma engage in some verbal jousting.



12:28 p.m.
By afternoon, delicious smells from the cafeteria lure the animators outside.



4:27 p.m.
It's a small world, after all: Vinod looks on as an editor struggles to figure out the @#\$%ing VCR!



8:30 a.m.
Richard likes to start the day with a crippling accident.



9:13 a.m.
After a quick trip to the hospital, the studio gets down to business.



Tenali Raman



Maharaja Cowboy



11:08 a.m.
Jithin, Binoy and Philip refill their creative juices.



2:06 p.m.
The 3D animation team pops up to say "Hello!"



3:10 p.m.
The Toonz gurus strike a pose for Animag.



5:34 p.m.
Quitting time! Renju makes a break for it—let's hope that wall doesn't get in the way!



6:02 p.m.
After work, Abhilash unwinds with a round of cricket. "Hmm... maybe this bat could be a good 'motivational tool' around the studio!"



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